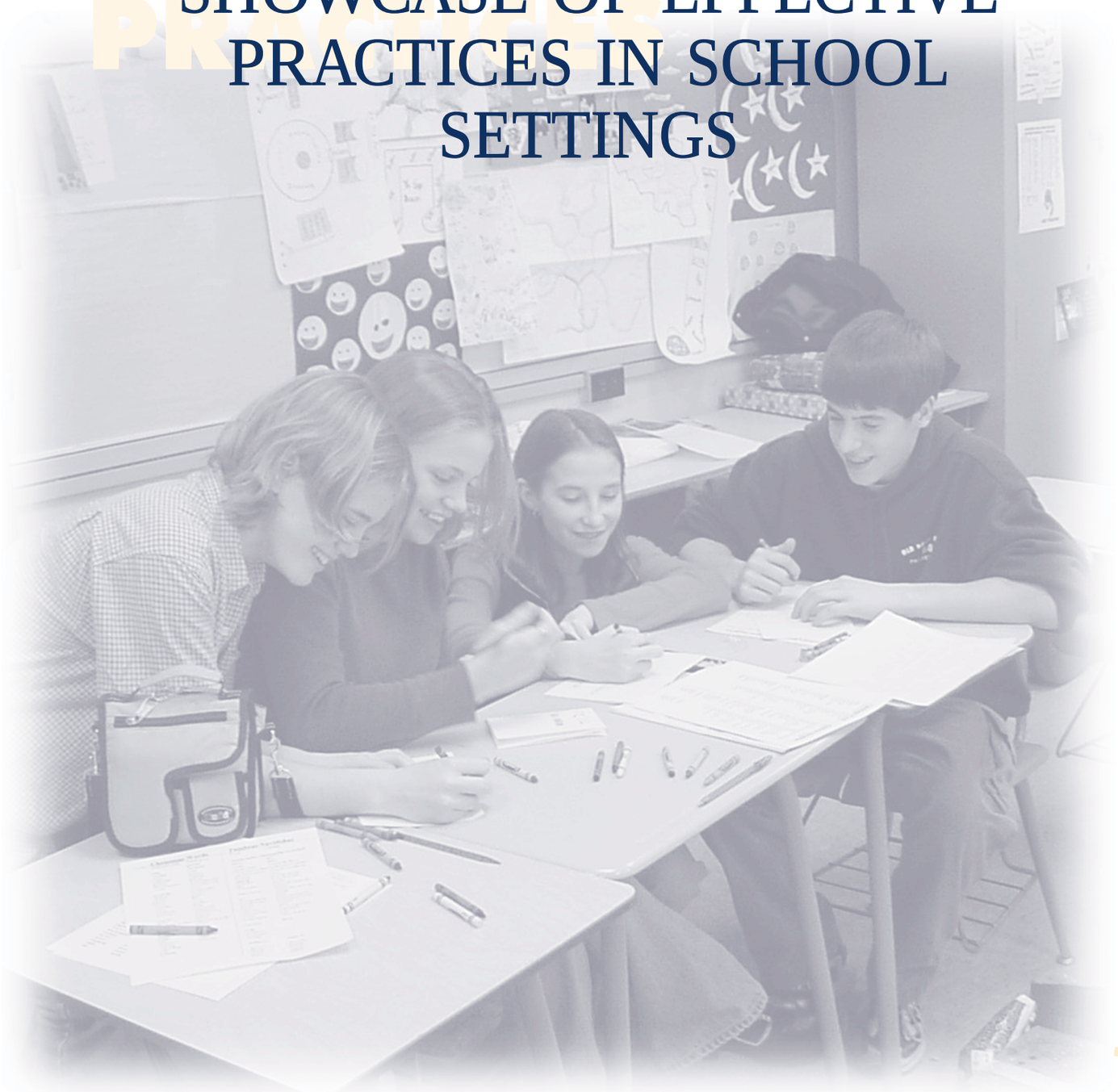
CHAPTER SIX

BEST PRACTICES: A SHOWCASE OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOL SETTINGS



BEST PRACTICES

The following practices are examples of the Hallmarks described in Chapter 2, and the process described in Chapter 3. By featuring practices that already enjoy successful implementation in school settings, we offer evidence that schools in Maine can achieve the vision outlined in this report. We also hope these examples of concrete practices will give administrators, teachers, parents, and communities practical ideas that may work in their schools and inspire them to engage in the creation of a culture of ethics and responsibility in their own schools and communities.

AN ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGY

An Anti-Bullying Strategy

The James H. Bean School in Sidney began a program of bullying prevention two years ago. This K-6 program is part of a comprehensive system of discipline and skill building where adult authority is kept intact while students are encouraged to exercise decision-making skills and treat themselves and their classmates with kindness, respect, and honesty. Building students' self-esteem and decision-making skills is not a rationale for adults to avoid or take a "soft" approach to discipline or intervention. According to Stan Davis, the school's guidance counselor, "The root word for 'discipline' means to teach." At Bean, clear, consistent, and fair consequences are enforced, while the offending student continues to be a valued member of the school community.

Students are also encouraged to intervene when a bullying situation arises. Students are taught to take the following Anti-Bullying Steps when they, or a classmate are being bullied:

- Tell the bully to stop
- Tell a teacher
- Reach out in friendship

This and the other strategies utilized at Bean work because all the adults on school grounds, including cooks and custodians, have received training in bullying prevention and are committed to preventing harmful behavior in their school.

Students also are exposed to the anti-bullying message in the curriculum by, for example, reading a book that includes a character experiencing bullying. Students are then given the opportunity to act out such a situation and problem solve.

Adults at Bean are expected to intervene immediately when students are causing either physical or verbal harm to one another. All students caught causing physical or verbal harm must visit the principal's office, where they learn the consequences of their actions. They are also required to reflect meaningfully on their actions by completing a Think About It Form, which asks the questions:

- What have you done?
- Why was the behavior wrong?
- What problem were you trying to solve?
- How will you solve that problem next time without hurting anyone?

Being dedicated to a comprehensive approach, staff members at Bean go beyond enforcing consequences for unacceptable behavior. They balance the responsibility of maintaining physical and emotional safety with positive reinforcement through their Caught Ya Practice. Whenever and wherever an adult or a peer sees a child demonstrating helpfulness, politeness, or kindness, they acknowledge that child by including his or her name in a monthly drawing in which the winner receives a small prize.

Parents are also a critical part of Bean's efforts to create an ethical and responsible school culture. Teachers and parents consistently maintain contact with each other; in some grades, students bring home assignment notebooks with homework assignments which parents check and sign. This notebook is also a place for teachers and parents to share concerns and praise about student's progress and behavior.

VALUES, PLANNING, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Values, Planning, and Conflict Resolution

Principal Suanne Giorgetti has watched the culture at Benton Elementary transform since adopting a values-based, proactive, and skill-building approach to education and discipline. These days, Principal Giorgetti hears on a regular basis from teachers and parents about how nice

it is to come into a school where children consistently demonstrate respect for both adults and each other. This was not always the case. There was a time at Benton when teachers were frustrated and discouraged by increasingly disrespectful behavior.

Principal Giorgetti and her colleagues made a conscious decision to change their approach to dealing with unacceptable behavior. Rather than dealing with individual acts, they took a systematic approach to identifying the values, creating effective interventions and teaching conflict resolution skills on a school-wide basis. The desired outcome of this three-dimensional approach was to create and maintain an orderly, safe, and respectful environment for all.

The first step was to identify values, or ideals that all members of the school community would be expected to uphold. Benton Elementary went through a process similar to the one outlined in Chapter Three to identify the values that make up their code of ethics. These values serve as a foundation for the establishment and enforcement of expectations for student behavior. The Core Values identified at Benton were:

- Responsibility
- Respect
- Honesty
- Cooperation
- Tolerance/ Acceptance
- Courtesy
- Self-Control/ Self-Discipline
- Consideration
- Dependability

Acknowledging that there would still be a need to address problematic behaviors and ensure safety on school grounds, the second step was to create a method of intervention that was consistent with these values. The purpose of the intervention is to help students identify problematic behavior and understand the impact of that behavior on self and others, and to develop a plan to avoid a repetition of the situation. To that end, Principal Giorgetti and her colleagues developed and began to utilize what they call a "Planning Sheet". The "Planning Sheet" outlines the following intervention guidelines within the context of Benton's Core Values:

- Intervention occurs immediately. Staff members are available to cover classrooms to allow time for teachers to confer with the student while the situation is current.
- Student and teacher work together to identify the incident.
- The teacher works to reduce emotional intensity and assists students in developing a reliance on rational words and ideas.
- Student and teacher develop a plan, based on the student and the school's values, for how the student will behave the next time a similar situation arises.
- Consequences for the current behavior are determined, based on the school's disciplinary guidelines.
- The teacher and student conclude the conference with a call to the student's parent to explain the situation and how it has been resolved.

The next step was to provide students with the skills they needed to apply the values adopted at Benton Elementary and to learn to resolve differences before they become conflicts. To that end, a Conflict Resolution Model was adopted and implemented in every classroom. The Conflict Resolution Model, adopted for both teachers and students at Benton, is outlined below:

- Calmly admit to the conflict and the feelings you have about it.
- Plan a meeting, making sure you have the necessary information and thinking carefully about what you would like to discuss.
- When you meet, make sure everyone has a turn to speak and make sure you truly listen.
- Decide what the problem is and what the source of the problem is.
- Look for solutions that can be agreed to, focusing on the present and not the past.
- Write down or state the understood agreement and set a time to check on the solution to see if it is working.

Building Connections

In 1998, Mt. Ararat Middle School turned to the community when it came time to design a new middle school for 900 students. While anticipating and envisioning the physical characteristics of their new school, this community also chose to use this as an opportunity to envision and strengthen the culture of the school.

Principal Bette Manchester, in consultation with Dr. Bruce St. Thomas, began by presenting a guided imagery project that engaged approximately 1000 students from second through eighth grade. As students and staff imagined visiting their future school, drawings were completed to represent their concepts and imaginings. Information was also gathered from interviews of students and staff. The input of students and staff was used as a guide in the design of the new facility.

Moving beyond discussions and plans for the new building, the focus turned to the atmosphere and the deeper values within the larger community. Most striking was the children's capacity to imagine a learning center that focused on a shared community role through caring for animals, children, adults, and seniors within the local towns and neighborhoods.

Building on the momentum of this vision of multigenerational collaboration, Dr. St.Thomas and Principal Manchester worked with Ross Cameron, leadership facilitator at Camp Kieve, and with faculty to take other steps to create this Vision of Community with collaboration at all levels. Action steps taken to deepen their vision included:

- A 2 day workshop involving all staff, including non-instructional personnel (i.e., transportation, kitchen and custodial staff) followed by;
- 2 days of workshops involving the whole school to identify core values and develop a student-owned code of conduct to carry to the new school;
- The establishment of advisor/advisee relationships between students and teachers which serve as a vehicle for culture-building activities, further strengthening those relationships;
- The encouragement of adults in the community to mentor students; and
- Fostering a desire among students to perform community service.

"Building Connections" has become the ongoing work and vision for Mt. Ararat Middle School. The desired outcomes of this vision and these action steps are aimed at building meaning into the community by developing:

- Trust
- Safety
- A sense of identity
- A feeling of ownership
- Shared responsibility
- Shared celebration

Values and Teamwork

The four teachers responsible for educating the 60 sophomores (approximately one-third of the sophomore population) on their team at Edward Little High School are having the best experience of their careers. The Secondary Teaming Program at Edward Little High School in Auburn utilizes integrative teaching, service learning and alternative/progressive assessment. This team of teachers and students engages in learning and service activities within the context of values identified by the students.

Each year the incoming sophomore class engages in a process of identifying values, and behavioral indicators for those values. This process is a student–driven and teacher–facilitated activity. For the students, engagement in this process begins with a writing prompt. The team's English teacher asks students to complete the following sentence: "In order to create a safe, healthy and productive learning culture…"

The values identified through this exercise are integrated into all five classes attended by this team: English, Social Studies, Science, Math, and the Team Lab. This year, not only did the sophomore team identify values for their team, but a freshman team has been inspired to do so as well. According to English teacher Brian Flynn, change of this kind is made incrementally and it takes time. Moreover, the "community" may begin in a single grade before it encompasses the entire school culture. The Core Values identified by the students on the 1999-2000 sophomore team were:

- Trustworthiness
- The Golden Rule
- Respect
- Honesty
- Love

According to Flynn, the integration of values into the teaming program has improved students' ability to guide their own behavior with their consciences, rather than having teachers direct student behavior solely through fear of punishment. Students and teachers on the sophomore team take these values very seriously. It is not only teachers who remind students to live up to these values—students also point out to one another and to teachers when their actions are not living up to the standards.

The following are practices utilized by the team members as they continually strive to embrace and act upon their values:

- *Service Learning—Taking action actually tests values; past teams have undertaken the following:*
  - Constructed an amphitheater;
  - Erected a greenhouse and grew a variety of plant life;
  - Created an outdoor classroom;
  - Engaged in trail building; and
  - Mentored local elementary school children.
- *Modeling – Teachers on the team try to consistently model:*
  - Collaboration and teamwork in lesson planning and delivery;
  - Respect for students and colleagues;
  - Critical thinking skills;
  - Service to the school and the community; and
  - Faith in every student's ability to learn.
- *Critical Thinking – An overarching emphasis on these skills provides:*
  - A framework for discussion of ethical issues;
  - An effective means of integrating the core values into all disciplines; and
  - A mechanism for thoughtful conflict resolution.
- *Team Building – All students come together during a team lab period where teachers facilitate and ensure:*
  - Synthesis, by students, of materials covered in each discipline;
  - The building and maintenance of a team ethos;
  - That students reflect on the relationships among the courses they are taking within the context of the team's core values; and
  - That teachers and students discuss the planning, progress and meaning of their service learning project.
- *Evaluation and Recognition – Continuous improvement is ensured through all facets of the Teaming Program, by:*
  - Students' self-evaluation of their efforts and abilities;
  - Constant dialogue between teachers and students regarding students' effort and progress; and
  - Teacher and peer recognition of students' attitudinal and academic achievement.

Democracy in Action

According to former Principal George Marnik, Mt. Desert Island High School is a place where students are significantly involved in meaningful decision-making, and opportunities for genuine leadership. Such involvement means that students share with adults the responsibility of creating a healthy school environment. Facilitating, nurturing and demonstrating ethical and responsible student behavior in our schools requires, by definition, that students be actively involved in the process of creating such a school culture. This is especially true as students progress in their schooling, grow older and more mature, and become increasingly aware of both the rights and responsibilities attendant to their actions as participants in their own academic learning and social development.

Two methods for encouraging and sustaining meaningful student involvement described by Dr. Marnik and implemented at Mt. Desert High School are the:

- Hearing Committee; and
- Student Leadership Organization.

Instituted in 1975, the Hearing Committee is an elected board, consisting of an equal number of students and adults. The Hearing Committee has addressed a wide variety of very serious infractions of school policy over the past 25 years. Committee meetings are open to the entire school community as aggrieved parties face one another. Student and adult committee members make their recommendations for action directly to the administration.

The Hearing Committee process is taken very seriously by all members of the school and deliberations carry such weight that it is rare that the assistant principal or principal does not adhere to its recommendations. This fact is testimony to the value placed on the trust and mutual responsibility shared by students and adults in working to establish a just and caring school environment. The high degree of respect, shown by adults who actively involve students in decision–making central to student life, helps students at Mt. Desert to better understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship beyond high school.

The second critical component that helps to shape the student-centered culture at Mt. Desert Island rests in an organization known as Student Leadership. It is a dynamic group of young adults who serve as a positive, proactive student organization. The student leaders are trained in a variety of practices for serving fellow students, the school and the community including:

- Peer Mediation;
- Peer Education;
- HIV Education;
- Tutoring;
- Peer Support; and
- School and Community Service.

Adult advisors work to ensure that the group's membership reflects the diversity of students within the school. Underlying this effort is a belief that leadership can demonstrate itself through many different people. Any student can apply to participate in Student Leadership. Students are selected to serve in this organization based on contributions to the school, potential for leadership, willingness to serve others, and commitment to work toward meeting identified personal and group goals. The inclusive nature and success of this organization is evidenced by the participation, in Student Leadership, of over 10% of the student body each year. Such a broadly defined effort places a significant value on students as the primary constituency of educational efforts.

It is a core belief of the faculty at Mt. Desert that learning has significant ramifications beyond the four years of high school. Issues of personal responsibility, citizenship and community building are as integral to the development of productive and wholesome individuals as is academic success. In the short term, greater student involvement in the life of the school and community means less alienation and fewer destructive behaviors. In the long term, such involvement leads to adults who are better educated, more concerned for others, and more positively and actively a part of their communities.

Restorative Discipline

> "Believe it or not, part of the joy of working with the children in my class is working together with them at issues of discipline. Just about every situation that is a conflict of some sort can be used as a teachable moment in our life together."
>
> -Roxanne Claasen (2000: 4)

Discipline should be implemented in a way that includes opportunities for both students and adults to learn and to teach. Intervention to stop the harm, whether physical or emotional, must come first but it should be quickly followed by efforts to resolve conflict and to refocus attention on the harm to the victim and the community. One approach of this type, known as "restorative discipline", is an offspring of the restorative justice approaches increasingly utilized in the judicial system, particularly in dealing with juvenile offenses. Community resolution teams in several Maine communities are implementing restorative juvenile justice approaches. Tom Ewell of the Maine Council of Churches has studied the restorative approach and seen it applied in schools and other settings.

Restorative discipline demands accountability for behavior, and focuses on the needs of the victim (if any) and of the community, while treating offenders as capable of responsibility and deserving of respect. Some traditional discipline systems focus attention on the offending or misbehaving student, and on the extent of the punitive sanctions to be imposed. Discussions of proportionality or fairness typically are directed at the severity of the punishment, in comparison to the severity of the offense.

In contrast, restorative discipline seeks to shift the focus to the harm done to the victim and the school community. The focus is on the corrective action that should be taken by the offender, and fairness lies in the determination of whether the offender has taken appropriate actions to redress the impact on the victim and/or community.

The key aspects of this type of discipline are:

- That it be immediate, not something that is pursued a week later but something that happens as soon as safety is assured, while the incident is still fresh;
- That it be face to face, not working through intermediaries but with all those who are affected gathering at one time and place;
- That its primary focus be on redress of the harm done rather than on the rule that was broken, beginning with the victim (if any) and then with the broader community;
- That the offender accepts personal responsibility for his or her actions, both to the victim and to the community; and
- That the offending student develop an improved understanding in order to be better able to prevent or correct future behavior.

The restorative component of a disciplinary system can begin only after an intervention is made to stop inappropriate behavior or language, and only after the offending student has accepted responsibility for his or her behavior.

When misbehavior or conflict occur, the first step must be intervention to stop the harm and protect the victim. After the initial intervention, a restorative component can play an important role, but it must be adapted to the type and circumstances of the offending behavior. In a context where conflicts or problems are multifaceted or mutual (e.g., where peer mediation is appropriate), those involved are called together. This gathering is often called a circle and "calling for a circle" is a request to deal with a behavior or a conflict. In other circumstances, where there is an imbalance of power among those affected (e.g., bullying), the restorative component can only be initiated and managed through the intervention of adult authority.

The success of restorative discipline depends on the ability and willingness of those involved—especially a victim—to help define the damage and to help create a resolution that is perceived as adequate and fair. To be effective, it takes

courage on the part of all involved, to structure a solution on the basis of the consensus of all those who have a stake.

Restorative discipline's strength is its potential for creativity and flexibility in customizing the actions to be taken by the offender. Apologies may be made, or property returned, or some other tangible expression of making things as right as possible may be the restorative outcome. Resolution may call for a progression of steps, each dependent on the success of the last. However, flexibility is never a substitute for accountability; it will always be necessary to implement real resolutions, and to check and evaluate them for effectiveness. There must not only be monitoring and follow-up to ensure that the agreed–upon course of action has been followed, but also penalties for failure to follow through with that resolution.

Restorative discipline is no panacea; it is not appropriate or effective in all circumstances. Schools must have well-thought-out, consistent, reasonable systems of disciplinary interventions and consequences in place as a backdrop and complement to restorative approaches.

Stan Davis, a guidance counselor at Sidney's Bean School with extensive experience in anti-bullying efforts, observes that approaches like restorative discipline are likely to be most effective when the misbehavior is an isolated offense, rather than an incident in a pattern of repeated aggressive behavior or repeated bullying (i.e., the repeated victimization of the same vulnerable individual).

In the case of bullying or repeated aggressive behavior, it is often inappropriate to seat the perpetrator and the victim in the same circle. The victim is often afraid to speak up and fearful that to do so is to invite further victimization. In bullying there is an inherent imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, so intervention by adult authority is needed to redress that balance. Thus, in their use of restorative discipline, schools must not abdicate the responsibility to provide both protection and consistent disciplinary measures. Peer mediation is often an inappropriate substitute for adult authority in bullying situations for the same reason. Adult authority must be exercised to protect the victims of bullies, with clear penalties.

Davis also observes that approaches like restorative discipline may be more effective in situations where blame has been fixed and where the restorative approach is offered to the offender as an alternative to some other, more traditional type of penalty. This traditional penalty would be imposed if the offender fails to live up to the terms of the agreed-upon alternative resolution.

The discussions, listening, and student reflections involved in the restorative approach, as well as the customizing of redress to the harm done in the particular situation, take more time and energy than simply banishing students from the room or the school. The corresponding benefit is that the solutions developed are likely to be more concrete, appropriate, fair—and perceived as fair, and effective, thereby reducing the likelihood of the problem recurring.

Regardless of the method by which disciplinary consequences are imposed, the "consequences imposed should still be tested by whether they are reasonable, related, restorative and respectful." (Ron Claasen 2000: 3)